

News from the

U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

Michael B. Enzi (Wyoming), Chairman



For Immediate Release

Contact: Craig Orfield 202.224.6770

Monday, January 23, 2006

Enzi Says Improve Mine Safety; Speed Rescues, Save Lives

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee today said he believes better communications systems might have changed the outcome of the Sago and Alma mine disasters that took the lives of 14 miners in West Virginia, and promised to investigate how new technologies can be developed to better protect workers in the coal industry.

Following a visit to West Virginia and a series of meetings there last Friday, Enzi said he will thoroughly investigate how new technologies can be developed to improve radio communications between mine workers, rescue teams, and officials above ground and how technology can help extend the supplies of life saving oxygen miners rely on following an explosion or cave ins.

Enzi, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), the Committee's Ranking Member, Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA), and Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) met Friday with the families of Sago Mine workers as well as officials of the International Coal Group (ICG) and Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA).

"It's unclear how the mining industry as a whole is benefiting from all that modern technology has to offer to make the workplace safer," Enzi said. "Knowing that technology and American ingenuity can bring forward revolutionary change in the workplace, we have a duty to look carefully at technology as a means to avoid future accidents like these in coal mines across the country."

Enzi also has scheduled two hearings in response to the tragedies. A January 31 confirmation hearing for Richard Stickler, who has been nominated to head MSHA and Edwin Foulke, who has been nominated to serve as the head of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). In addition, the HELP Committee also will hold a March 2nd oversight hearing on mine safety.

“After listening to the families and mine workers of West Virginia on Friday, I have a better understanding of the strain coal families live under on a daily basis,” Enzi said. “These families deserve answers – not only about why these tragedies occurred but also on how they can be avoided. We will do our best to get those answers.”

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